

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMITTEE

*Interim Report of the Committee on
University Teaching Methods*

THE USE OF VACATIONS
BY STUDENTS

LONDON

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

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COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING METHODS

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FOREWORD

By SIR KEITH MURRAY

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When, in March 1961, the University Grants Committee appointed the Committee on University Teaching Methods they did so, not because they wished themselves to dogmatise about teaching methods, but in the belief that the discussions which are taking place in some universities about teaching methods would be assisted by an inquiry which would assemble accurate information on the subject covering all universities in Great Britain.

The Committee's enquiry has been extensive, but they are not yet ready to make their full report. They have, however, completed one very important part of their enquiry and its importance and timeliness warrant the issue of an interim report on the use made by students of the vacations. The resulting picture is somewhat disquieting in view of the fact that, of the time occupied by the great majority of undergraduate courses, three-eighths is vacation.

The report says that if full value is to be obtained for the public expenditure on university education, students should make better use of their vacations. It does not advocate any lengthening of the periods during which students receive teaching, taking the view that to learn to work on his own is perhaps the most important thing for which a student should use his university course, and that the vacation is the time for this.

The University Grants Committee have agreed that this is an important topic which warrants immediate discussion and they therefore commend this interesting report for consideration by the universities and by those whose interests lie in enabling the students to obtain the maximum benefit from their relatively few years of university education. It is clear from this report that the undergraduate's academic year is too often identified in the minds of both staff and students with the 30-odd weeks of "term".

May, 1963.

COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING METHODS
INTERIM REPORT TO UNIVERSITY GRANTS
COMMITTEE

THE USE OF THE VACATIONS BY STUDENTS

1. We were appointed on 10th March, 1961, by the University Grants Committee "to make a comparative study of undergraduate teaching methods and practices current in the Universities and Colleges of Great Britain in the fields of arts and pure and applied science." We have been informed that the last words are to be read as covering the whole field of undergraduate study with the exception of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science. We have assumed that the institutions within the scope of our inquiry are those which participate in the Treasury grants administered by the University Grants Committee who appointed us. Our inquiry is not yet completed, but it has drawn our attention to one matter which is relatively self-contained and which seems to us to raise questions of sufficient urgency and importance to justify an interim report. We refer to the use made by students of the vacations.
2. Among the responsibilities borne by those who teach undergraduates is that of ensuring that good use is made of the vacation. Most university courses in England and Wales are of three years. In Scotland the normal period is also three years for courses leading to ordinary degrees, but for honours (rather under half the degrees awarded in Scotland) it is four years. Outside the medical field the proportion of undergraduates taking four-year courses is 15 per cent (of whom about one third are in Scotland), and there are very few courses which exceed four years. In practice a three-year course is one of two years and nine months, and a four-year course is one of three years and nine months, including in each case the final examinations.
3. Each of the last two quinquennial reports of the University Grants Committee has referred to the overloading of undergraduate courses,* and some of the witnesses who have come before us have also emphasised the increasing difficulty, as the volume of knowledge increases, of compressing into a three-year course all that they think a science student should master before graduation. There is no doubt that this difficulty is responsible for the heavy programmes of teaching with which students, particularly of science, are faced. In this situation it is natural and necessary to ask whether the best use is being made of the vacations, which account (even when the terms are of ten weeks, and not of eight as at Oxford and Cambridge) for some three-eighths of a three-year or four-year course. The current cost to public funds of a university student who is wholly dependent on an award for his course is estimated at £850 a year, taking into account an appropriate share of the Treasury grant to his university

* Cmnd. 8875, July 1953, paras. 82 seq; Cmnd. 534, September 1958, paras. 70 seq.

as well as the cost to the rates and the Ministry of Education or Education (Scotland) Fund of his fees and maintenance. Full value is not obtained for this expenditure if for three-eighths of the period of his course the student's time (apart from that needed for reasonable relaxation) is not used to advantage, and if university plant and buildings are less fully used than they might be, consistently with the needs of senior members of the University engaged on research and scholarship.

4. We therefore thought that we should find out what steps are taken to ensure that students use the vacations to advantage, and how in fact they use them. To this end we collected information from three main sources:—

- (a) A statistical survey in which a sample of about 2,000 students of the second and later years were questioned, by interview, on the use which they had made of the long vacation of 1961 for the purpose of their studies. The questionnaire used for this survey is printed as Appendix I to this report. A memorandum summarising the results of the survey was circulated to universities, and is printed as Appendix II. We are glad to take this opportunity of expressing our gratitude for the co-operation which we received from University departments and organisations, including Students' Unions, in carrying out this survey. The response was 93 per cent, a truly remarkable figure. We are particularly indebted to London University who put their tabulating resources at our disposal. This enabled us to dispense with outside assistance and produce the results of the survey far more promptly than would otherwise have been possible.
- (b) A statistical survey carried out by means of a questionnaire addressed to a one-in-four sample of university teachers. This was part of a wider survey carried out for the Committee on Higher Education and for us by Messrs. Attwood Statistics Ltd. The questions on teaching methods and cognate matters addressed to teachers of undergraduates within the scope of our inquiry were answered by just over 2,000 respondents. This represented a response of 84 per cent, which was also a remarkably high figure, particularly as the questionnaire was administered by post, and was much longer and more elaborate than any which students were asked to answer. The questions asked in this survey included some on the use of the vacations by students. A summary of the information obtained from these latter questions is included in the memorandum referred to at (a) above (Appendix II).
- (c) Universities were asked to furnish memoranda giving answers to a number of questions, including one on the steps taken to ensure that the vacations are used to advantage by undergraduate students. Most universities had sent in these memoranda before the results of the statistical survey at (a) were available to them, but most of them had received the memorandum summarising the results by the time they gave oral evidence. We have now completed hearing oral evidence from universities, and have been able to take into account, in preparing this interim report, the comments thus obtained orally.

5. From the universities' replies to our questions we learn that it is common but not universal practice to give students programmes of reading for the vacation. In some cases it appears that such programmes are given only on request. A few departments at some universities organise reading parties at which students undertake courses of vacation study under the supervision of a member of staff. Most university departments do not set tests to see that recommended reading has been done. It is well known that at the beginning of term the Oxford Colleges set examinations known as "collections" on vacation reading. Elsewhere only a minority of students undergo such tests, but at some universities a few departments set essays, dissertations, or other written work, to be prepared in vacation, and account may be taken of these dissertations in final examinations.

6. In a number of universities students of foreign languages are encouraged, and sometimes required, to spend time abroad, and in some universities funds are available to assist students to travel. Departments of Science and Applied Science concerned with subjects in which field experience is desirable (e.g. geography, surveying, archaeology, agriculture, geology, and some forms of biology) usually offer field courses in the vacation, and attendance at such courses is sometimes compulsory, account being taken in the final examinations of students' reports on their work during these courses. Some departments in the field of Social Studies follow a similar practice. Students of technology and agriculture are generally expected, commonly helped, and in some places required, to obtain employment in industries or on farms in which they can get practical experience of their subjects. Science students may also be encouraged to obtain employment in research laboratories, and law students to gain practical experience by working in solicitors' offices.

7. In general, university libraries, including faculty, departmental, and college libraries, allow students to borrow books for vacation reading, though in some cases there is a limit on the number of books that can be borrowed during the vacation, and books may be subject to recall if required by another reader. There is more variation of policy about periodicals. In a few cases periodicals cannot be borrowed by undergraduates in vacation at all, and in some borrowing is limited either to back numbers or in time. All university libraries are open in vacation, and the same is probably true of most faculty and departmental libraries. The great majority of university libraries are open to students of other universities. The opening of laboratories in vacation is less easy, and sometimes they are open only by special arrangement or to limited classes of student. At some universities residential accommodation is available during part of the vacations, but it seems to be little used.

8. It is exceptional for teaching to be offered in vacation, except as part of the field courses organised in certain subjects such as have already been mentioned. The so-called "Long Vacation Term" at Cambridge is well known, though not all Faculty Boards provide courses of instruction, and college teaching is rarely provided. A few universities offer laboratory or workshop courses. At some places students who are not making satisfactory progress can get informal teaching during the vacation, but such arrangements seem to be rather unusual.

9. In the statistical survey referred to in paragraph 3 (a) students were asked whether they had received advice from any of their teachers as to books on their courses to be read or other work to be done during the vacation. To this 58 per cent of respondents answered yes, 71 per cent in the field of arts and social studies, 47 per cent in the field of pure science and 31 per cent in the field of applied science. Of university teachers responding to the questionnaire referred to in paragraph 3 (b) 68 per cent said that their students were given programmes of reading or other work to be done in vacations, the variations between subject groups being similar, at a higher level, to those shown by the student survey.

10. Very few students ($\frac{3}{4}$ per cent of the sample) received any teaching in the vacation. Students were asked on how many days in the vacation they made any use of premises of their university or college for purposes of study. The proportions of the sample who made some use of libraries, laboratories and other premises were 19 per cent, 5 per cent, and 10 per cent respectively. Libraries were more used by students with early examinations in prospect than by other students, but of those who used libraries, fewer than half did so on more than six days. Just over half of the foreign language students (15 per cent of the sample) spent some time in a country in which the language studied is or was spoken, and most of these periods were over 28 days. Students were asked for how long they undertook paid or unpaid field or practical work, of which examples were given, in order to promote their understanding of a subject in their course. Of the sample 40 per cent said that such work was not applicable to their courses. Of the other 60 per cent only half did any such work. Of those who did any such work, about one in three did it for over two months.

11. Each respondent was then asked to estimate the average daily hours for which he worked at a subject in his course during periods of the vacation when he was not using university premises, or abroad as a foreign language student, or doing field or practical work to promote his understanding of a subject in his course. A daily average of an hour or less during such periods was claimed by 53 per cent of respondents, over one but not over three hours by 31 per cent, over three but not over five hours by 11 per cent, and over five hours by 5 per cent. There was relatively little difference in the hours claimed by finalists (45 per cent of the sample) and other students, but older students were somewhat more diligent than younger. The daily averages claimed by students of arts and social studies were higher than those claimed by scientists. The great majority of students (78 per cent) said that they were able to get, by borrowing or purchase, all the books they required for vacation study, but there is some evidence to suggest that they did not all find it easy to do so,* and if, as the result of measures such as we suggest below, there were an increase from the present low level of vacation reading, these difficulties might well increase.

12. Paid employment not primarily designed to further their studies was taken by 62 per cent of the sample, and about three quarters of those who

* In a recent survey carried out in the University of Manchester over half of 462 arts students answered yes to the question whether they encountered difficulty in obtaining books for work in the long vacation connected with their courses. In our own survey 71% of Manchester students of non-laboratory subjects said that they were able to get all the books they required. It thus appears that some of those who got the books only did so with difficulty.

took such employment took it for over four weeks, the median duration being 6·3 weeks. The daily average of study of those who took four weeks or less of such employment was actually slightly higher than that of those who took no such employment at all. Only where the period of employment was over 8 weeks (18 per cent of the sample) did the daily average fall seriously below that of the sample as a whole. Finally, there was a very marked difference between the daily hours of study claimed by those who at the end of the vacation or the beginning of the term had to undergo some examination, test, or inquiry, and those whose vacation was clouded by no such prospect.

13. We cannot regard the present situation as satisfactory. In saying this, we are conscious that our statistical evidence relates only to the long vacation. We have no definite evidence as to whether better use is made of other vacations, but our impression is that there is not much difference. Even if the other vacations are better used, we could not regard this as atoning for the misuse of the long vacation, which accounts for thirteen or more of the twenty-two weeks of vacation of those universities which have ten-week terms. While relatively little work is done by the majority of students in the long, and perhaps other, vacations, in term too many students are given programmes of formal instruction which would involve overlong hours of work if the reading and written work expected of them were also conscientiously done. This is particularly the case with science, pure or applied. The evidence we have received shows that in this field weekly hours of formal instruction (including practical classes) as long as, or even longer than, 30 hours are not uncommon, and that 24 hours are generally regarded as normal, at any rate in the earlier years. On the top of this the student has to find time for private study and written work. These long hours leave the student little time for the worth-while extra-curricular activities of a broadly educational character which should be an essential part of his life at the university.

14. On the other hand many students receive little or no guidance on the way in which they can best use the vacation. It is not in all cases easy to give such guidance for the long vacation. For many students the session ends with an examination, the results of which may affect their work in the coming session, and may not be known before the vacation begins. The student may be coming under new teachers in the ensuing term, and may even be starting a new subject. A student who has just completed an examination may not be in the mood to find out for himself what he should read to prepare himself for the work of the next session, and this means that someone must take the responsibility for informing him on the point. There may be difficulties in doing this, particularly when his work in the next session depends on examination results, but the importance of making good use of the long vacation is such that difficulties arising from the timing of examinations and the discontinuity of courses should not be regarded as insuperable.*

15. Without guidance on the use of the vacation, the student tends to keep it clear for earning or other activities, too often of a trivial character, instead of using it to prepare himself for the next term's work or catch

* In the Manchester survey referred to above, roughly half the respondents expressed themselves as satisfied with the guidance they received on vacation reading connected with their courses, but among General B.A. students this proportion fell to 29 per cent.

up with reading which has been crowded out in term time. The result is that the student's course may become quite unbalanced, with periods of high and low academic activity alternating in a way which has little rational justification. Apart from reasonable holidays, the vacation should differ from the term in the type rather than in the intensity of the student's academic activity, the term being the time when he takes full advantage of his teachers' availability, the vacation that when he learns to work on his own; and to work effectively on his own is perhaps the most important thing that he should use his university course to learn.

16. Some of those who have given evidence to us have urged that the remedy for the congestion of the scientific curriculum is to add another year to the first degree course. In the second of their reports referred to above the University Grants Committee estimated that to lengthen by a year all undergraduate courses in England and Wales outside the medical field would make it necessary to increase student numbers by about 20,000 if a loss in "throughput" were to be avoided. This estimate would need to be raised by about a quarter to take account of the increase in student numbers up to 1960-61, and the figure is still rising. The Committee expressed the view that any general lengthening of undergraduate courses would be impracticable at the time when their report was written, and it would be no easier today. It could probably only be done at the cost of either reducing the numbers admitted or accepting a degree of overcrowding which might well neutralise any benefit from the lengthening of courses. It would certainly be difficult to justify the effects of lengthening university courses by another thirty weeks of term, when the present three-year course includes fifty-three weeks of vacations which, if the long vacation of 1961 is at all typical, might be so much more fully used by students than they now appear to be.

17. In the past, when a majority of students came from homes with a tradition of university work, and reading, as distinct from practical work, loomed larger in university courses than it does today, it was the normal practice of the serious student to spend much of his vacations in reading. Students read less in the vacations today. They buy fewer books, and there is some evidence that the sums included for book purchase in awards to students are too often used for other purposes.

18. There are several causes for this decline in reading. In the first place the balance of emphasis in university work has changed. Science, pure and applied, claims an ever increasing proportion of students, and though science students can read with advantage, and most of them should read much more than they do, there are many scientific subjects in which some of the vacation can profitably be given to field or practical work. Students of engineering and other technology can get in industry, and students of agriculture can get on farms, work which promotes their understanding both of their subjects and of their prospective fellow-workers. Biologists, geographers, and geologists, all benefit from field courses, and there are openings for temporary work in research laboratories for a fairly wide range of scientists.

19. There are other factors, however, which have tended to the decline in vacation study. The present-day university student is commonly the first of his family to reach a university, and where this is the case both the physical conditions in his home and the attitude of his family are often unfavourable to study. There may be nowhere for him to read, and his family may hardly recognise reading as work. They tend to identify work with gainful employ-

ment, and the student's uneasiness at his inability to contribute to the family budget makes it difficult for him to resist this identification. Students who receive grants at less than the full rate because their parents are expected to contribute to their maintenance do not always obtain such a contribution, and these students may have no option but to make up the deficiency by earning in the vacations. But students may be diverted from reading to gainful employment by causes other than family pressures. Students are generally hard-up in comparison with their contemporaries, and this puts them at a social disadvantage which it is only natural that they should wish to remedy.

20. Those who tend to regard vacation study as unpaid "overtime", and prefer to spend the time in raising their incomes by earning, find support for this attitude in the views of those who hold that gainful employment, even if irrelevant to a student's course, is a broadening experience which helps to develop his personality, and that the student who depends on public funds should contribute to the cost of his maintenance by earning in the vacation. The latter view appears to be based on the assumption that the vacation would otherwise be spent in idleness. But this should not be so. A student who has accepted public money to undertake a university course—and all students have done so, at least indirectly—should pursue it single-mindedly and steadily, except for reasonable holidays, to its conclusion, and by doing so will make the best use of the money spent on his education.

21. To this students might well reply that the basis on which grants for maintenance are payable to them by public authorities is such as to encourage them to spend much, if not most, of their vacations in gainful employment. Much the greater part of such a grant is for maintenance in term time, and the amount included for maintenance in vacations (£30) is clearly not intended to enable the student to dispense with some other source of income for most of the 22 weeks of vacation. Earnings from work done in vacation (whether or not the work has any bearing on the student's course) are exempted from the general rule under which a maintenance grant is liable to reduction if the student's personal income exceeds £100 a year. This must appear to the student to be a clear indication that the authority which has awarded his grant expects him to support himself by earnings in the vacation. We do not suggest that a student should receive during the vacation maintenance grants at a rate appropriate for full-time study away from home irrespective of whether he is in fact so engaged; we think, however, that it would not be practicable to expect more than a small minority of students to embark on a course of serious vacation study without some provision to relieve the undoubtedly financial difficulties which such a course would create for many students, particularly those whose home circumstances are unfavourable to study.

22. Another pressure which tends to divert the student from study in the vacation is the opinion now widely accepted among students that the most valuable way in which they can spend the vacation (and particularly the long vacation) is in foreign travel. The climate of opinion is such that a student can earn prestige simply by accomplishing a long and difficult journey, and the spirit of emulation leads others to follow his example. Some foreign travel is certainly valuable as a broadening experience, but we think that the pendulum has swung too far. To students of foreign languages and cultures foreign travel is of direct academic benefit, and is rightly encouraged—and in some cases required—by

university departments; nor are these by any means the only students whose minds will be stimulated and whose academic interests will be enriched by foreign travel which has been intelligently planned and intelligently carried out. From such travel there can be undoubtedly real, if sometimes imponderable, benefit to the student as a scholar; and surmounting the difficulties of travel in a strange land on very limited finance will call into play qualities which are not brought out by the student's university course, but which are needed for a full development of his personality. The question is how far these indirect benefits outweigh the loss of time for study, and there is no answer to this question which is true in every case. It depends on a number of factors, including the way in which the student uses his time when not actually moving from place to place, the quality of his reaction to his experiences, and the length of time which is lost to study as a result of the journey, and which may be more than that actually spent abroad. Foreign travel, however economically done, is beyond the means of most students, and the desire to raise funds for this purpose is another incentive to vacation employment. Thus foreign travel may take from the time available for study not only the time spent abroad, but also the time spent in earning money to pay for it, and between these two distractions little of the long vacation may be left.

23. For these reasons we think that for many students the most suitable times for prolonged foreign travel, or other broadening experiences which develop the personality, would be either during the interval between school and university, or during that between graduation and a permanent job. There is much to be said for using the former interval for some broadening experience, provided that it does not last long enough to impair the student's capacity to think academically. It is at least arguable that many a boy or girl coming straight from school is too immature in personality (however precocious intellectually) to reap the full benefit of a university course, and that this immaturity lies at the root of some of the problems to which we shall revert in our final report. Many university teachers have observed the broadening effect of national service on some of their students who have experienced it before entering the university, and for this reason it was the practice of some universities to advise students in suitable cases not to seek deferment. But no-one would regard national service in the middle of a university course as anything but a handicap to its successful conclusion, and in general we take the same view of interruptions which are longer than are reasonably required by way of holiday.

24. It may be suggested that if students ought to pursue their courses steadily except for reasonable holidays, the university terms should be so lengthened that the remaining vacation periods would be justifiably used as holidays. We do not think it either necessary or desirable that the periods during which students receive teaching should be extended to last for more than 30 weeks in the year. Any proposal to extend university terms would be strongly opposed on the ground of its effect on research and scholarship. But even from the point of view of the student we would not think such a change desirable. Once his university course is over he will have no teacher to lean upon, and he should

therefore be learning to do without teaching. He gets enough teaching in term-time already, and, as we have said, the vacation should be used for training himself to work independently.

25. In the questionnaire which was answered for us by a sample of university teachers, respondents were asked whether it would be both desirable and practicable to get students to do more academic work in vacation, either (a) in the long vacation preceding their final year only, or (b) in this and other vacations. The great majority (84 per cent) of respondents answered yes to either (a) or (b), 15 per cent to (a) and 69 per cent to (b). Those who so answered were invited to say which of a number of specific methods (not mutually exclusive) should be used to produce the desired effect, and the answers given are summarised at the end of the memorandum which forms Appendix II. Respondents were also given the opportunity of suggesting methods other than those specified, and this opportunity was taken by 22 per cent of those who answered yes to either (a) or (b), i.e. by 18 per cent of all respondents. We advisedly did not include financial inducements among the specified methods, and it was interesting that roughly half of those who suggested other methods were in favour of giving students more money in one way or another, the object being in most cases to make it unnecessary for students to take paid work irrelevant to their courses.

26. Students whose home circumstances are unfavourable to study have undoubtedly found it difficult hitherto to pursue their studies in vacation, particularly if their homes are out of reach of a university library or a public library offering satisfactory facilities for reading. Such students have been able to do little academic work in vacation except by leaving home, and this of course is expensive. The question of expense is the more important because the long vacation is the season of the year when the student dependent on a grant is at his most impecunious. The reason for this is that grants (including the £30 element for maintenance in vacations) are normally paid in three equal instalments at the beginning of term. Thus the student who has adjusted himself to living on each of his first two instalments for $14\frac{1}{2}$ weeks, finds himself in the summer with 23 weeks to provide for, and if he cannot fulfil the conditions on which additional payments are made he will be under pressure to take paid employment in the long vacation. We think, therefore, that the timing of instalments, or the amount of that which has to last the longest, might with advantage be reconsidered so as to reduce the pressure on students to take paid employment during the long vacation. But much more than this will be needed if the financial impediments to vacation study are to be removed.

27. We therefore welcome the relaxation in the conditions governing additional payments which has been introduced in England and Wales by the University and Other Awards Regulations, 1962 (No. 1689), and particularly the new rule which places a duty on the local education authority to make the holder of an award additional weekly payments (£5 if he has to live away from home and £2 if he has not) "if on the recommendation of the academic authorities he undertakes a course of vacation study under their guidance." In Scotland, where students' allowances are paid direct by the Scottish Education Department, additional allowances for vacation study

are paid only where "such study is certified by the university or college authorities as being an integral and compulsory part of the student's approved course." This is a more restrictive requirement than that which we have quoted from the new regulations for England and Wales, and we hope that it may now be relaxed. Indeed, we hope that payments for vacation study will not be confined, either in England and Wales or in Scotland, to students whose courses satisfy precisely defined specifications, and that universities will be accepted as judges of whether a particular course of vacation study will be of value to the student.

28. We attach much importance to a liberal interpretation of the rules governing payments for vacation study. The additional expenditure which would result, and which we regard as necessary if full value is to be obtained for expenditure on university education, would be inconsiderable in relation to the current cost to public funds (£850) of a university student who is wholly dependent on an award; and if a fuller use of the vacations is to be regarded as an alternative to longer courses, the necessary cost is infinitesimal in comparison with the expenditure, capital and recurrent, which longer courses would involve if the output of graduates were to be maintained.

29. The relaxation in the conditions governing additional payments for vacation work gives universities the opportunity to consider whether there is more that could be done to ensure that students make good use of the vacations. It seems to us to be unsatisfactory that 42 per cent of all students (54 per cent in Scotland) should have said that they did not receive advice from any of their teachers on books to be read or other work to be done in the long vacation of 1961; that so little time was given to study by most students; and that 44 per cent of students underwent no test or inquiry as to their use of the vacation at the beginning of the autumn term. We think that every student should be questioned at the end of term about the use he proposes to make of the vacation, made to understand the importance of the vacation period whether for reading or practical work related to his course, and given advice when he appears to be in need of it.

30. When on such occasions reading is advised, he could be questioned about his facilities for reading at home, and we hope that universities will put themselves in a position to make constructive suggestions in cases where reading at home seems likely to be difficult. At some universities students have opportunities to take part in courses of vacation study under general guidance and supervision, but without teaching, and the relaxation of the rules governing additional payments should make it possible to organise such courses more widely. An alternative possibility which this change should make financially practicable would be to provide accommodation in halls of residence so that students can undertake a course of vacation study at the university library. It is for students that halls of residence have been provided, and their needs ought to take priority over the multifarious conferences to which halls now tend to be given over in vacation. We do not think that this alternative would create any problems of finance or supervision which universities should find difficult to solve. If accommodation in halls of residence could be made available, on a reciprocal basis, to students of other universities, the broadening effect of a change of scene could be combined with academic work.

31. In one way or another, we think that vacation reading periods, and similar arrangements designed to overcome the difficulties which many students find in pursuing their studies at home, should be introduced much more widely. Not only might this go far to correct the lack of balance in students' courses to which we have drawn attention ; it would also increase the training given to students in working on their own, to which we attach so much importance as an essential part of their university education. Varying views may be held about the desirability of setting anything like an examination on vacation reading, but at least every student should be questioned at the beginning of the ensuing term on his vacation activities and made to feel uncomfortable if he has wasted his time.

32. To some these proposals of ours may appear to be unduly paternalistic, but they are far less so than the close supervision to which students are subject during the university terms and which contrasts strangely with the general laissez-faire of the vacations. A university student should certainly be learning to live an adult life, in term as well as in vacation, but we do not think that a student coming at age 18 or 19 from the closely ordered régime of school, with perhaps no family background of university education, should be left without guidance about the use of vacations. In the absence of guidance it is only natural that he should regard them as holidays, and it seems clear that too many students do so regard them.

Summary

33. We draw attention to the fact that the vacations represent about three-eighths of most university courses (paragraphs 2 and 3). We then summarise the information which we have collected to show what steps are taken by universities to secure good use of the vacations by students, and the extent to which students used the long vacation of 1961 for the purpose of their studies (paragraphs 4-12). We contrast the long hours for which the student is expected to work in term-time with the small amount of work which he does in vacation, and which leaves his course quite unbalanced. To work on his own is perhaps the most important thing he should use his university course to learn, and the vacation is the time to learn this. We do not think that the effects of lengthening university courses could be justified while the vacations might be so much more fully used (paragraphs 13-16). We discuss the causes which appear to us to have led to a decline in vacation reading (paragraphs 17-23). We do not favour a lengthening of the teaching terms ; the remedy is to get students to do more academic work in vacations, a course which a great majority of university teachers consider both desirable and practicable (paragraphs 24 and 25).

34. We draw attention to the financial difficulties which a student may have in pursuing his studies in vacations, and while welcoming a relaxation in the conditions under which a student in England and Wales may obtain additional payments for this purpose, we express the hope that the rules governing additional allowances in Scotland may be relaxed. We hope that both in England and Wales and in Scotland universities may be accepted as judges of whether a student will benefit from a course of vacation study (paragraphs 26-28).

35. We invite universities to consider whether they could do more to ensure that students make good use of vacations, suggesting that every student should

be questioned at the end of term about his intended use of the coming vacation, and at the beginning of term on his use of the past vacation. Students who seem likely to have difficulty in working at home should be offered opportunities to take part in courses of vacation study, but without teaching, or to occupy halls of residence so that they can use university libraries. This would correct the present lack of balance in university courses and train students to work on their own. The guidance which we advocate would be less paternalistic than the close supervision which students receive in term-time, and seems to us to be necessary if vacations are not to be treated as holidays (paragraphs 29-32).

E. HALE (*Chairman*).
R. G. D. ALLEN.
D. G. CHRISTOPHERSON.
J. S. FULTON.
J. H. E. GRIFFITHS.
J. E. HARRIS.
A. G. LEHMANN.
MAY MCKISACK.
J. S. MORRISON.
MARY R. PRICE.
E. M. WRIGHT.

April, 1963.

APPENDIX I
COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING METHODS
Inquiry B—Long Vacation 1961

Questions on the use of the Long Vacation to be answered by a sample of undergraduates engaged on first-degree courses, or courses of equivalent standard, lasting normally for not less than three nor more than five years, in any subject except medicine, dentistry or veterinary science and in any year except the first.

OCTOBER 1961

Unless otherwise indicated, questions should be answered by ringing the appropriate number in the space at the right-hand margin. Help and explanation will be available from an interviewer.

1. Name.....	Initials:
2. Reference Number	
3. Age on 1 October 1961	Under 21 1 21 but under 25 2 25 or over 3
4. Sex.	Male 1 Female 2
5. Course of studies. See Appendix A State below the subject(s) you are studying and write in the right-hand margin the number(s) of the subject group(s) in which they lie: _____ _____	
6. Will you be taking your final examination at the end of the academic year now beginning?	Yes 1 No 2
7. Did you receive any advice before the vacation from any of your teachers as to books on your course to be read, or other work to be done, during the vacation?	Yes 1 No 2
8. Were the books which you were able to obtain, for vacation study, whether by borrowing or purchase, sufficient for your needs?	Yes 1 No 2
9. (a) On how many weekdays during the vacation did you receive teaching on a subject in your course?	None 1 1-6 days 2 7-12 days 3 13-24 days 4 More than 24 days 5
(b) Was this teaching given by:	(i) a teacher or teachers of your own university or college 1 (ii) a teacher or teachers of another university or college 2 (iii) other persons (specify) _____

(Note: (i), (ii) and (iii) are not mutually exclusive)

10. On how many weekdays did you make use, for studying a subject in your course, of any premises of your university or college?

(i) library	None	1
	1-6 days	2
	7-12 days	3
	13-24 days	4
	More than 24 days	5
(ii) laboratory (including drawing offices, machine rooms, museums or map rooms)	None	1
	1-6 days	2
	7-12 days	3
	13-24 days	4
	More than 24 days	5
(iii) other premises (specify)	None	1
	1-6 days	2
	7-12 days	3
	13-24 days	4
	More than 24 days	5

11. If you are studying a foreign language, how many days of the vacation (including Sundays) did you spend in a country or countries in which the language was or is spoken?

(Note: For purposes of this question English is NOT to be regarded as a foreign language)

Not applicable	1
Applicable:	
None	2
1-14 days	3
15-28 days	4
over 28 days	5

12. For how long did you do, whether or not under supervision, any field or practical work (paid or unpaid) in UK or abroad, which you undertook in order to promote your understanding of a subject in your course (e.g. engineering student in industrial workshop; sociology student on social survey; biology student at marine biology station; agriculture student on farm etc.)?

Applicable:	Not applicable to your subject	1
	None	2
	One month or less	3
	paid	3
	unpaid	4
	Over 1 but not over 2 months	5
	paid	5
	unpaid	6
	Over 2 months	7
	paid	7
	unpaid	8

13. During periods other than those recorded under questions 10, 11 and 12, approximately how many hours a day, on the average, did you work at a subject or subjects in your course?

1 hour a day or less	1
over 1 hour but not over 3 hours	2
over 3 hours but not over 5 hours	3
over 5 hours	4

(Note: 'Work' is meant to include reading, making notes, working at problems, doing exercises etc.)

14. Did you, towards the end of the vacation or immediately after it, resit, in whole or in part, any examination which you took and failed before the vacation?

Yes	1
No	2

15. At the beginning of term were you set any written exercise or test on work set to be done during the vacation, other than an examination covered in question 14?

Yes	1
No	2

16. Was any other check or inquiry made as to the use you had made of the vacation for any purpose connected with your studies?

Yes	1
No	2

- *17. For how many weeks did you undertake paid employment not primarily designed to further your studies?

None	1
2 weeks or less	2
over 2 weeks but not over 4	3
over 4 weeks but not over 8	4
over 8 weeks	5

- *18. State average weekly earnings for paid work:

(a) Under question 12:	£5 or less	1
	over £5 but not over £10	2
	over £10 but not over £15	3
	over £15	4
(b) Under question 17:	£5 or less	1
	over £5 but not over £10	2
	over £10 but not over £15	3
	over £15	4

(Note: the above information will be treated as strictly private and will be used only to arrive at aggregates)

* Questions included at the request of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education.

Appendix A

S U B J E C T G R O U P S

- Philosophy, logic, moral science, theology.
- English language and literature.
- Other languages and literatures and kindred studies.
- History (including archaeology, ancient and economic history and history of science).
- Economics, political science, social science, sociology, anthropology, political economy, accountancy.
- Law.
- Geography.
- Psychology.
- Mathematics (including statistics).
- Chemistry (including technical chemistry).
- Physics.
- Biology, botany, zoology, geology, microbiology, genetics, physiology, biochemistry.
- Engineering (including mining and metallurgy).
- Technology other than engineering.
- Agriculture, horticulture, forestry.
- Other subjects not involving laboratory or drawing office work.
- Other subjects involving laboratory or drawing office work.

(Note: Many courses fall in more than one group)

APPENDIX II

COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING METHODS

Inquiry B—Use of Long Vacation by Students

1. A sample of 2,004 undergraduate students of the second and later years, engaged on courses in subjects other than medicine, dentistry or veterinary science, was used for this inquiry, and usable returns were received from 1,861, 93 per cent. of the sample. Of those who completed returns 73 per cent. were men and 27 per cent. were women. According to the U.G.C. returns the percentages of men and women in 1960-61 among all undergraduate students in faculties other than medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science, were 74·2 and 25·8 respectively.

2. The proportions in various age groups are given in the table below. The ages are those at the beginning of the year, so that 'finalists' will be nine months older when they take their finals.

Age	Men		Women		Both Sexes	
	All	Finalists only	All	Finalists only	All	Finalists only
Under 21 ...	55	33	74	56	60	39
21, but under 25 ...	40	62	24	42	36	57
25 and over ...	5	5	2	2	4	4
Number in group ...	1,357	615	504	219	1,861	834

3. Of those who completed returns, 1,105 (60 per cent.) were specialists in the sense that their field of study was comprised within one of the 17 subject-groups into which the field of undergraduate studies was divided for the purpose of the inquiry. Those who expected to take their final examinations at the end of the year were 45 per cent. of those responding.

4. Students were asked whether they had received any advice from any of their teachers as to books on their courses to be read, or other work to be done, during the vacation. Such advice was received by 58 per cent. of students completing returns. Of those studying subjects in groups 1-6* (representing broadly the field of social studies and arts) 71 per cent. received such advice, of those studying subjects in groups 10-12† (representing broadly the field of pure science) 47 per cent. received such advice, and of those studying subjects in groups 13-15‡ (representing broadly the field of applied science) 31 per cent. received such advice. The fact that such advice was received by a higher proportion of women (68 per cent.) than of men (55 per cent.) seems to be little more than a reflection of the fact that a higher proportion of women study arts. On the other hand the differences between the proportions receiving such advice at the different groups of universities seem in some cases (e.g., Oxford and Cambridge 75 per cent., Scotland 46 per cent.) to be greater than can be accounted for by differences in the balance of studies.

5. In the questionnaire recently completed by a sample of 2,017 university teachers covering the same range of studies as the sample of students used for Inquiry B, one of the questions was 'Are your students given a programme of reading or other work to be done in vacations?'. This question was answered 'yes' by 68 per cent. of the sample. The difference between this percentage and the 58 per cent. of students who admit to having received advice on this point may be considered to cast some doubt on one or both of these figures. It is, however, a difference which remains roughly constant between subjects. Thus 84 per cent. of teachers in certain of the main arts subjects said they had given advice on vacation work, and 71 per cent. of students

* Philosophy, etc., languages, history, economics, social studies, law.

† Chemistry, physics, biology, etc.

‡ Engineering and other technology; agriculture, etc.

in a rather similar range of subjects said they had received it. The corresponding percentages in physics and chemistry, taken together, are 54 per cent. (teachers) and 48 per cent. (students) and in engineering 42 per cent. (teachers) and 31 per cent. (students). Similarly 84 per cent. of teachers at Oxford and Cambridge said that they give such advice and 75 per cent. of students there said that they received it, the corresponding percentages for Scotland being 55 and 46 per cent. Possible explanations of the differences between teachers and students may be that some teachers who habitually give such advice do not succeed at the end of term in making contact with all their students; and some students who received such advice may forget that they received it.

6. To the question whether the student was able to obtain, by borrowing or purchase, sufficient books for vacation study, 78 per cent. said 'yes'. This proportion does not vary significantly between students engaged on subject-groups 1-6 and 10-15 respectively. Of foreign language students (338) 80 per cent. could answer 'yes'. Nor does the proportion vary significantly between finalists and non-finalists. The differences between groups of universities are not large, though the proportion answering 'yes' is slightly higher at Oxford and Cambridge (85 per cent.) than elsewhere.

7. Teaching during the vacation was received by only 8½ per cent. of those responding, and fewer than half of those received it from teachers of their own university or college. The proportions of those responding who made any use during the vacation of premises of their own university or college were:—

	Percentage using	Number using
Libraries	19	357
Laboratories (as defined)	5	86
Other premises	10	187

The first of these figures varied according to the imminence of examinations. Of those resitting examinations after the vacation, 29 per cent. made some use of the libraries of their university or college, and this must represent a high proportion of the maximum number of users, as only about 30 per cent. of students live within 30 miles of their university, though this last proportion is higher (54 per cent.) in Scotland where resitting of examinations is commonest. Of those not resitting examinations only 17 per cent. made use of their libraries. Similarly, of finalists, with somewhat more imminent examinations, 23 per cent. made some use of their libraries, as against 16 per cent. of non-finalists, with more distant examinations. Of those who used their libraries, more than half did so on 6 days or less, and only 13 per cent. (i.e., 2 per cent. of all responding) did so on more than 24 days.

8. Students of foreign languages (other than English) represented about 15 per cent. of those responding. Such students were asked how many days they spent in a country in which the language they were studying is or was spoken. Just over half (52 per cent.) of these students went abroad to such a country, and of those who did so 20 per cent. spent 1-14 days there, 23 per cent. 15-28 days, and 57 per cent. over 28 days. Thus about three out of every 10 foreign language students spent over four weeks in a country in which the language studied is or was spoken.

9. Of all students responding, 40 per cent. said that field or practical work was inapplicable to their subjects. Of those studying subjects to which such work would have been applicable, only half did any in the long vacation. Of those who did any, 30 per cent. worked in this way for a month or less, 38 per cent. for over one month but not over two, and 32 per cent. for over two months. Of those who worked in this way the great majority (80 per cent.) were men. Of the men who worked in this way 75 per cent. received pay, but rather over half of the few women who did this kind of work did it without pay.

10. Students were asked for how many weeks they undertook paid employment not primarily designed to further their studies. The following table shows the proportions of men and women, and of students at the various groups of universities, who undertook various periods of such employment.

	By sexes		By University Groups						All
	Men	Women	Oxford & Cambridge	London	Larger English ¹	Smaller English ²	Wales	Scotland	
Number in groups	1357	504	371	244	561	216	123	346	1861
Proportion who took no employment	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	39	35	46	33	38	30	33	43	38
Took it for 2 weeks or less	5	8	5	11	3	5	2	6	5+
Over 2, not over 4 weeks	9	15	8	18	10	14	12	6	10
Over 4, not over 8 weeks	28	28	27	22	30	34	29	23	28
Over 8 weeks	20	14	14	16	19	17	24	22	18
Proportion taking paid employment	61	65	54	67	62	70	67	57	62
Median length, in weeks, of paid employment for those taking any	6.6	5.6	6.1	5.3	6.6	6.0	6.7	6.9	6.3

Of those who took paid employment, just under 30 per cent. of the men, and very few of the women, earned over £10 a week. Just under 10 per cent. of the men earned over £15 a week.

¹ Birmingham, Bristol, King's College Newcastle, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester (including the College of Science & Technology), Nottingham, and Sheffield.

² Durham Colleges, Exeter, Hull, Keele, Leicester, Reading, Southampton.

11. Each student was asked:

- (a) whether towards the end of the vacation or immediately after it, he resat, in whole or part, any examination which he took and failed before the vacation;
- (b) whether at the beginning of term he was set any written exercise or test on work set to be done during the vacation, other than an examination as at (a);
- (c) whether any other check or inquiry was made as to the use he had made of the vacation for any purpose connected with his studies.

12. The following table shows, for each university group, the proportions of students in each of these categories and of those who were subject to no test or inquiry at all:

	Oxford and Cambridge	London	Larger English	Smaller English	Wales	Scotland	All
Resit examination	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... Other written test	1 41*	3 14	14 12	9 15	15 16	43 12	15 19
Other inquiry	24	29	27	31	31	7	22
No resit, test, or inquiry	34	54	47	45	38	38	44

* This figure lacks significance, as there is no similarity at this point between Oxford and Cambridge. Of the 154 Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates who did written tests after the vacation, all but two were at Oxford.

13. Having been asked the number of days on which he (a) used university premises, or (b) was in a foreign country in which a language in his course is or was spoken, or (c) did field or practical work to promote his understanding of a subject in his course, each student was asked the average number of hours a day for which he worked at a subject or subjects in his course during periods other than those spent as at (a), (b) and (c). Of those who replied to this question (1,823 out of 1,861) 53 per cent. claimed an average of one hour or less, 31 per cent. an average of over one but not over three hours, 11 per cent. one of over three but not over five hours, and 5 per cent. one of over five hours.

14. The replies to this question about daily hours of study have been correlated with the replies to a number of other questions in order to see what differences there are between the daily hours worked by various groups of students. The following table gives the relation between daily hours of study on the one hand and age and the approach of final examinations on the other:

Age:	Under 21		21 and over		All
	F	N F	F	N F	
Finalist or non finalist:					
Daily hours claimed	%	%	%	%	%
One or less ...	56	56	49	49	53
More than one but not more than three	27	31	31	37	31
More than three but not more than five	13	9	14	9	11
More than five...	4	4	5	6	5
Number in group	315	789	499	220	1,823

Thus age appears to make more difference than the advent of final examinations to the diligence of students. In either age group, the proportion of finalists who failed to exceed one hour a day is as great as that of non-finalists, but this proportion is markedly higher in the lower age group than in the higher. On the other hand, the approach of final examinations seems to result in a certain increase in either age-group of those who exceed three hours a day.

15. The following table shows the average daily hours of work claimed by students engaged on subjects in groups 1-6 (broadly, arts) and groups 10-15 (broadly, science) respectively.

Daily hours claimed	Students engaged on subjects	
	in groups 1-6	in groups 10-15
One or less	%	%
One to three	43	65
Three to five	35	24
More than five	14	7
Number in group	6	4
	1,319	1,037

In interpreting these figures it will not be overlooked that the period to which the daily average hours relate excludes any period spent in field or practical work, or by a foreign language student in a country in which the language studied is or was spoken.

16. There are other influences which appear to affect the amount of work done by students in vacations. In the first place, there seems to be a definite correlation

between the daily hours claimed and the receipt or non-receipt of advice on vacation work (see paragraph 4), as may be seen in the following table:

Daily hours claimed	Received advice on Vacation work	Did not receive such advice
One or less ...	45—%	66
One to three ...	36	23
Three to five ...	14—%	8
More than five ...	6	3
Number in group ...	1,076	747

In paragraph 4 it was shown that advice on vacation work was more generally given to arts students than to science students, and as the differences between the daily hours claimed by recipients and non-recipients of such advice correspond closely to the differences between the daily hours claimed by arts and science students respectively, it may be that all these differences spring from the fact that arts subjects are more conveniently studied in vacation than science subjects, and that this results both in more advice as to how and what to study in vacation, and in more study.

17. Vacation activities which break into leisure that might otherwise be devoted to study include:—

- (a) field or practical work (paid or not) undertaken to promote the student's understanding of a subject in his course;
- (b) paid employment not undertaken to promote his studies.

18. The following table shows how hours of study and field or practical work interact:—

Daily hours claimed	Students to whose courses field or practical work is				
	Inapplicable	Applicable, and who did			
		None	One month or less	One-two months	Over two months
One or less ...	%	%	%	%	%
One to three ...	43	57	55	66	68
Three to five ...	37	30	35	18	22
More than five ...	14	10	6	10	7
Number in group ...	719	557	167	207	173

19. This table seems to show that, whatever the reason why the science student spends less time in study in vacation than the arts student, it is not simply because his time is occupied in field or practical work, since even those to whose courses such work is applicable, but who do none, spend less time in study than those to whose courses field or practical work would be inapplicable. On the other hand it also appears that where a student spends more than a month on field or practical work, his inclination to study at other times is reduced. In interpreting this table, it will be remembered that students were asked, in estimating their daily average hours of study, to exclude any period spent in field or practical work.

20. The following table shows the relationship between paid employment not undertaken to promote the student's course, and average daily hours of study:—

Daily hours claimed	Period of paid employment				
	None	Two weeks or less	Over two not over four weeks	Over four not over eight weeks	Over eight weeks
One or less ...	49	45	42	54	71
One to three ...	30	36	37	34	22
Three to five ...	14	13	16	9	5
Over five ...	7	6	5	3	2
Number in group ...	689	88	196	511	399

In interpreting this table it should be noted that students were not asked to exclude any period of paid employment not undertaken to promote their studies in estimating their daily average hours of study. It may therefore be asked why students who take no paid employment should be less diligent than those who take such employment for not more than four weeks. Possible, but conjectural, explanations are that the latter are more energetic than the former, and that the former include a proportion whose home circumstances militate both against taking paid employment and against academic work.

21. Finally one can ask how the daily hours of study claimed by students during the vacation are related to their expectation of having to submit to some form of test or inquiry at the end of it. The following table shows how these factors are related:—

Daily hours claimed	Subject to test or inquiry			Subject to no test or inquiry
	Required to resit examination	Set written exercise or test, other than resit of examination	Subject to other check or inquiry on use of long vacation	
One or less ...	35	36	52	68
One to three ...	42	37	31	25
Three to five ...	15	19	12	6
More than five ...	8	8	5	1
Number in group ...	263	344	407	809

These figures seem to speak for themselves.

22. In the questionnaire already referred to which was completed by a sample of university teachers, respondents were asked whether it would be both desirable and practicable to get students to do more academic work in vacations. This question was asked (a) of the long vacation before their final year only, and (b) of this and other vacations. The great majority (84 per cent.) answered 'yes' to either (a) or (b), 15 per cent. to (a) and 69 per cent. to (b). Of the classes of teachers for which separate figures are available, the proportion of negative answers to both (a) and (b) was substantial only among engineers (47 per cent.), the next largest minority being among mathematicians (19 per cent.). Those who answered 'yes' to either (a) or (b) were invited to say which of a number of specific methods (not mutually exclusive)

should be used to produce the desired effect. That which won the greatest support (from 55 per cent. of those answering 'yes') was setting books to be read in vacation, but there was much less support (26 per cent.) for examining at the beginning of term on such reading, and this is interesting in view of the apparent connection between such examining and student diligence. Promoting more travel, field work, or reading parties, is favoured by 39 per cent., and in some subjects by a much higher proportion; making it easier for students to borrow books is favoured by 38 per cent., setting exercises to be done in vacation by 34 per cent., and increasing the availability of university premises by 32 per cent. Teaching in vacation at the university has few supporters (20 per cent.).

15/10